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THE ELECTION AND PROHIBITION

BY L. AMES BROWN

A RE-ASSESSMENT of the strength of the prohibition movement is necessitated by the recent elections. Because of the advances the prohibitionists have made and the substantial character of the progress they anticipate, it is the part of wisdom for the American public to take stock of the issue anew, and prepare to deal with it wisely. The radical political changes in the country, evidenced so graphically in the election returns, surround all active public questions with a new atmosphere and alone would demand a more modern determination of the potential importance of the prohibition issue along with the others, even if no striking increases in the strength of the movement had been revealed.

The outcome of the elections, as affecting the prohibition movement, is set forth in the following paragraph from a statement issued by the Legislative Committee of the Anti-Saloon League following a meeting at Washington in November, at which the election returns were analyzed and plans made for a new campaign:

Michigan has voted for State-wide prohibition by 65,000 majority, Nebraska by 35,000, Montana by 20,000, South Dakota by 25,000, and Alaska by a large majority. Idaho has adopted a prohibition constitutional amendment by a majority of three to one, after ten months' experience under statutory prohibition. Utah and Florida have elected legislators and governors pledged to State-wide prohibition. Washington, Colorado, Arizona and Arkansas have defeated attempts of the liquor people to secure the adoption of proposals which would have crippled their prohibitory laws, and Oregon not only did this, but greatly strengthened her law. Thus, twenty-five States out of forty-eight—over half the States in the Union—have now adopted or declared for State-wide prohibition, and over sixty per cent of the population and over eighty-five per cent of the area of the country are now under prohibition law. In less than two years just passed, prohibition laws have gone into

effect in States having a population of 12,000,000. The four States which have just voted dry have a population of more than 5,000,000.¹

The Philadelphia *North American*, declaring that "the liquor traffic met the most overwhelming condemnation that has been visited upon it in half a century," points out other interesting phases of the election outcome. It refers to local option victories in Maryland towns; to a reduction of 100,000 in the "normal majority favoring the saloons" in Missouri; the election of a Republican Governor in Minnesota, who had declared for State-wide prohibition; the election of a Republican Governor in Illinois who had declared for a county local option law, and the election of two United States Senators in Indiana who had declared for national prohibition. The *North American* points out also that Michigan, Nebraska and South Dakota, which adopted State-wide prohibition in this election, had tried prohibition many years ago and repealed their laws.

The twenty-five States which the Anti-Saloon League announces have adopted or declared for State-wide prohibition are Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, Arizona, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Oklahoma, Maine and Colorado. Thirty-two States must approve the suggested amendment to the Constitution in order that the movement succeed. Upon these facts Mr. Bryan predicates the statement:

"Prohibition is sweeping the country. It will be a Presidential campaign issue in 1920 if a Constitutional amendment is not submitted by Congress to the States by that time."

So much for specific data with regard to the achievements of the prohibitionists. They more than outweigh the belief of astute politicians that Mr. Hughes suffered severely in the recent campaign because the suspicion was entertained that he favored the restriction of personal liberty. The general character of the election itself must be examined carefully in connection with the study of the prohibition movement. Progressive political thinkers consider that the out-

¹The percentages given by the Anti-Saloon League include population and areas under local option laws as well as State-wide prohibition laws.

come fully authenticates their belief that the political supremacy of the West has been established and that the decisive influence in the next national campaign will be exerted by a group of States, including California, Minnesota, Washington and Oregon, where independent progressive voters are in the majority. The outstanding issues of the next national campaign, it is reasoned, will be chosen by the progressive elements in both of the political parties. The chosen candidates of that campaign will be committed to many of the progressive issues discussed in this campaign, with such addenda as seem best to interpret the spirit of radicalism and to appeal to the sentiments of the West. The next national campaign, therefore, is expected to be a contest for the favor of Western progressives, so the immediate future of the national prohibition movement will depend upon its success in getting itself assimilated into the progressive movement. Thus speculation as to the outlook for this movement must center around the question whether it is yet or is to be one of the accepted progressive issues in our politics.

It cannot be questioned that, broadly speaking, the territory where prohibition sentiment is dominant is co-extensive with the progressive section of the country. While it is true that the South, which until the last few years was the main stronghold of the prohibition movement, is not progressive in the accepted political sense, and that California and Ohio, where President Wilson found a ready response to his progressive policies, have emphatically rejected State-wide prohibition, it is a fact that prohibition's most important strength has been gained in the strongholds of the progressive movement and that it has this close kinship with the acknowledged progressive measures: It is knocking at the doors of the East for consummation.

This first impression that the prohibitionist may expect to establish the validity of his claim to the support of progressives is borne out by an examination of the general character of the so-called progressive issues. It has most of the characteristics of the measures which make up the progressive propaganda. Like the Child Labor Law and some of the human welfare proposals embodied in the progressive propaganda, the prohibition idea presupposes the conviction that the end justifies the means of accomplishing reform; in other words, it justifies the over-riding of the Constitutional

principle that regulatory matters of this sort should be controlled individually by the States. Like the measures referred to, it emphasizes in its arguments possibilities of better living conditions, better standards of home life and of workmanship and of morality, and in general proclaims, as they do, the invigoration and uplift of the rank and file of our Commonwealth. The yardstick of progressivism, applied to the prohibition idea as it has been applied to legislative proposals in the present era, reveals a more than superficial relationship between them. The arguments for both are of a piece, and casual study would seem to justify confidence in the expectation that the next few years will find the prohibitionist at the head of the progressive council table. He is certain to sit at the head if he is admitted at all, for the efficient political machinery which he has constructed and manipulated so skilfully will demand it inevitably.

Though one cannot predict success for the national prohibition movement merely because it is likely to be put forward as a leading progressive issue, it is unfair to close one's mind as to the relationship between prohibition and progressivism without giving a hearing to the self-styled constructive radicalism of the East, which has established the sincerity of its progressiveness by the strokes delivered in behalf of the progressive measures dealt with in recent campaigns. Many of these men avow their opposition to national prohibition and assert that its attainable aims can be better approximated by other means of dealing with the drink evil. Capable of analyzing the unacademic and oftentimes unsound arguments of the propagandists of the Anti-Saloon League, the intelligent radical in the East demands a more complete educational preparation than has been afforded thus far. He demands that progress shall consist in the assimilation of uplift measures instead of the attempted enforcement of the legislation designed to be beneficial. Men who take this sound position of necessity give proper heed to the nationwide experience that regulatory liquor laws cannot be enforced except where they are supported by public sentiment, and that the difficulties of enforcement are magnified commensurately with the size of the area in which a single standard of regulation is attempted. They consider also that prohibition, even local prohibition, is still in an experimental

stage in cities; that it has never been attempted in any of the great centers of population, and that it is sheer foolhardiness to propose to set up a national standard of liquor legislation until more adequate data have been secured regarding the possibilities of overcoming the obstacles in cities, which Mr. Taft has declared are almost insurmountable. The constructive radical tempers his enthusiasm for reform with the knowledge that the drink evil is as old as any of the ills that beset humanity and that it is unlikely to be overturned by a single mandate. Clearer demonstration of the efficacy of prohibition in States, and particularly in cities, must be given before he will be willing to set up by law the provocation to dishonesty among lesser public officials and to illegality by otherwise good citizens which he discerns in national prohibition.

These things go to the heart of the constructive criticism of the prohibition movement. They invite attention from men who have familiarized themselves with the viewpoint of history on reform movements. Time gradually measures up or measures down the law to the standards of contemporary opinion. These alterations are essentially sound in their general trend. Eventually the public distinguishes between sound and unsound reform measures and eventually the pendulum swings backward, though all of the forward distance be not yielded. Even in the present outburst of approval for the prohibition movement in the States, heed should be given to the fact that in the middle of the last century a great body of the States adopted and later repudiated it, and to the possibility of a parallel between that prohibition movement and this one.

Passing from such fundamental considerations into the realm of practical politics, other considerations are ascertainable which should supply hand-brakes for the optimist. It is as certain as can be that when the final test does come on national prohibition, if come it must, a measurable divergence will be revealed between the strength of the prohibition movement in the States and in the nation. If no other section where prohibition flourishes raises a hand for the ancient traditions of our Government with respect to States' prerogatives, the South is certain to do so. The South adheres to the old order of things governmental even as other sections sweep on cloudily to things more up to date and for the time being called more lofty. The Southern prohibi-

tionist who voted for State prohibition because it furnished a practical means of checking drinking among negro illiterates, will be a tardy recruit to a movement which would inflict his chosen system upon States which oppose it and at the same time would make it impossible for him to alter his own system should he choose to do so at some later time.

However one regards the movement itself, it is impossible not to admire its efficient propagandists for the speed with which they move forward and the sureness with which they strike. Within two weeks after the election they had mapped out their new programme and girded themselves for new struggles, determined to push the fight as rapidly as they can. This programme is set forth in the following:

THE SUBMISSION OF A NATIONAL PROHIBITION AMENDMENT:

With twenty-five States having declared for prohibition, with more than 60 per cent. of the population of the United States living in dry territory, Congress cannot longer deny the American people their sacred Constitutional right of passing upon the question of amending their Constitution in the manner which it provides. Congress should, at this approaching short session, pass the resolution to submit the amendment for national prohibition. Longer delay would be disloyalty to the principles of the Government which Congress serves, and gross injustice to the people who are making an heroic and efficient, though handicapped, effort to destroy the Nation's greatest evil.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PROHIBITION:

The Nation's capital should be the model city of the world and should express the highest and best governmental policy in promoting human welfare. To allow it to remain, in its moral standards, below the average of the Nation, would be inexcusable and disgraceful. More than half the States and a majority of the people have adopted prohibition as their governmental policy. The capital of the Nation, governed by the representatives of the people, should be dry. Congress should pass at once the District of Columbia Prohibition Bill.

ANTI-LIQUOR ADVERTISEMENTS:

It is but common justice that prohibition territory should not be handicapped in the enforcement of prohibitory law. It is highly important that the National Government shall not aid and abet the liquor traffic in its defiance of law. The Federal Government should forbid liquor makers and dealers to use the United States mails to advertise their outlawed liquors in dry territory. With all dispatch,

Congress should pass the bill forbidding the use of the mails for advertising purposes in all States in which the laws of the States prohibit such advertising.

PROHIBITION FOR HAWAII:

The native people of Hawaii have suffered, and are suffering greatly at the hands of the greedy and conscienceless liquor traffic of America. Their appeal for deliverance is strong and pathetic. Congress should, without delay, pass a prohibition law for the Hawaiian Islands.

Conservative political observers at Washington concede that the prohibitionist leaders have at least an even chance for accomplishing the major parts of this programme, namely, the passage of a resolution submitting the Constitutional amendment to the vote of the States and the enactment of a prohibition measure for the District of Columbia. Nearly two years ago the prohibition resolution, which requires a two-thirds vote for passage, received a majority of 197 to 189 of those voting in the House, and the prohibition amendment to the District of Columbia bill was held off mainly by technical obstructions. President Wilson did not actively oppose the Hobson resolution, although he had declared against it, and his influence in the matter will be less potent, if anything, in the new Congress. Two years ago I was informed by a man who undoubtedly had the President's confidence that he would veto the District of Columbia prohibition bill, if it were passed, without being conditioned upon a referendum to the people of the national capital.

All of the surface facts support the prediction of the Washington correspondent of the *New York Times* that the fight for submission of the constitutional amendment probably will succeed in the next Congress. The objection that the Congress will probably be so wrapt up in measures of national preparedness, especially those looking toward industrial preparedness, that it will not take up any purely domestic matters such as prohibition, on which a bitter fight is assured, is easily met by the prohibitionist leader. He accepts the whole national preparedness movement and tells you that no preparedness scheme is complete which does not embody provision for the fullest measure of physical and mental efficiency, while he himself subscribes to the opinion that prohibition would accomplish a higher degree of preparedness than all of the other proposals put together.

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